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DOCUMENTS

SOME WAR-TIME LETTERS¹

SOMEWHERE IN SUNNY FRANCE,

Aug. 18, 1918.

MY DEAR MRS. PIERSON: I feel as though I were dreaming, and am afraid I will wake up and find that instead of being back here in this charming spot, that I am still at the "front"! We were relieved a few days ago and came back here for a well earned and much needed rest. I did not realize that I *was* so completely worn out until we came here and I had a chance to rest—I want to sleep twenty-four hours out of the day!

We are camped in a beautiful and picturesque valley, and on the banks of a large river—the water is very clear and deep—Red Cross hospital boats, and others are carrying supplies, etc.! Needless to say, I have been practically *living* in the water, ever since we got here! Oh Boy! but it feels good to get in the water once more, and to *swim*! But I must tell you a joke on me—I had a chance to rent a room and sleep in one of these wonderful French beds, with a mattress about *four feet* thick! So I took it and thought I'd sleep swell, but to my disgust, I couldn't sleep—the room felt hot and stuffy—even though I had the big French window open, and two doors wide open—the bed was too soft! I have been living out doors and in the open so long that a room, no matter how well ventilated, seems stuffy. And I have had only the ground for a bed so that I feel as though I were going to fall out when I sleep in a real bed.

I am writing this letter in a schoolhouse and carved in the stone over the door is the date it was built, etc. It was built in 1754 and was founded by a Mademoiselle Therese Wills. It is a private school for little girls. The walls are covered with maps and pictures and drawings that the little girls have made—some of them are very good, too. The desks and benches are here too, and have the children's school books in them—a good

¹ The first installment of these letters, written home by Eldon J. Canright, appeared in the December, 1921, issue of this *Magazine*.

chance for me to study French—eh? It brings back memories of the days when I was a kid in school.

As I sit here I can look out of the window and see the peasants working out in the fields cutting and shocking the grain, and across the valley the steep, almost mountainous hills rising on either side of the valley, and the little villages dotting the sides of the valley and looking as though they were just stuck on the side of the steep slope and you wonder how they ever built them there—much less live in them—if a man ever slipped in his backyard, he would never stop until he rolled down into the valley! And you can see the white stone cliffs standing out above and below the trees. And away up on the very top is a high cliff of solid rock, and away up on that cliff, the Romans away back in the time of Julius Caesar, built a fort and that fort is still standing there to-day, having stood the wear and tear of *centuries*! When I look at that and think of the hundreds of years that fort has stood there, it makes one feel as though life was pretty short and of little consequence! However, those old Romans knew a good place for a fort, all right, because even to-day I doubt if with all our huge guns and modern equipment, we could destroy that fort—it is just cut right in the solid rock.

Everything is so quiet and peaceful here though it is hard to realize that just a few kilometers away the guns are roaring and crashing but when I shut my eyes I can see it all very plain and can hear the whine and shriek of the shells and *all* the other horrors of war. And probably by the time this reaches you I will be back on the job again.

You ask me when I think the war will end—well, when we are at the front we do not think about *peace*, our only thought and desire is to kill as many Germans as we can—when you hear the shells whining over head and bursting around you, you do not think of *peace*, you think only of giving them back as good as they send, and *then some*! So I really can't say just when I think it will end—it might be anywhere from one to five years more—you see we have got to make the Huns pay for all the suffering they have caused the people of France and Belgium—why right here in this school-room is a tablet with the names of

the men, just from this little town who have given their lives in this war and it's quite a long list!

Sincerely,

E. J. CANRIGHT,

Medical Department, 149th Field Artillery

A. E. F., A. P. O. No. 715.

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE,

Sept. 17, 1918.

MY DEAR FOLKS: I could almost head this letter "Somewhere in Germany" as we are driving the Germans back again, and at this rate will soon be in Berlin.

My regiment had the honor of holding the most advanced artillery position, so we are able to see the vast preparations for the attack. An attack is always preceded by heavy and concentrated artillery fire to destroy any enemy battery positions, machine gun nests, etc., and to prepare the way for the infantry. We had "beaucoup" artillery brought up there especially for the attack-guns of every size—big and little. There were guns everywhere; and shortly after midnight, at a given signal, every battery on that part opened fire. It was a very dark and rainy night—you could not see your hand before your face, but the blinding flash of the guns would reveal everything for a second and then all would be dark again for an instant until they fired again. We kept that up all night long; while we were doing that the tanks moved up into position preparatory to the attack. All that night they went by. We used two kinds of tanks—big ones about the size of a street car, and little ones about the size of a Ford car. You have seen pictures of them so know about how they look. They are made of steel and operate like a tractor engine, and travel a little faster than a man can walk, but they make a lot of noise—they rattle and clank like a threshing machine. However they will go over anything, trenches, ditches, shell holes, mud, etc., and will cut right through barbed wire. Nothing stops them. All that night at intervals between the roar of the guns you could hear the tanks rattling and bumping across the field and the flash of the guns

would reveal them moving slowly but steadily across the field like some huge, prehistoric monsters. It was a weird sight, I can assure you.

The tanks and the doughboys were scheduled to go over the top shortly after daybreak and it was some sight that morning to look across that vast field and see the tanks lined up and scattered behind them. All over the field, in groups and squads, were the doughboys waiting to make the attack. Then all of a sudden they started moving forward all along the line. The tanks led the way, spitting fire from all sides, with their machine guns, and following just behind them were the doughboys firing their rifles and using their bayonets as they advanced. It was just like the pictures you see in the movies, only *this* was the real thing. It is unusual for the artillery to go "over the top" with the infantry, but this time we actually did it—one of our batteries went over between the first and second waves of the doughboys.

Pretty soon we got orders to increase our range, so we knew that our troops were advancing through the German lines and going ahead rapidly. Oh Boy that's a wonderful feeling. Then batches of German prisoners began coming back under guard—some of them looked mad and sullen and others looked as though they were glad to be prisoners.

Of course we advanced too, although it was almost impossible for us to get through as the roads were almost wiped out from shell fire and then they were jammed with troops and equipment of all kinds, and all trying to go forward. I never saw such a jam in my life—we were hours getting anywhere. Whenever we got stuck when we were moving up, the German prisoners would help us out—many times I have pushed and pulled on a gun or caisson with half a dozen Germans pushing with me. It's great sport. In fact we were on the road all the next night, and all night long we could see the flames and the red glow of the towns and villages that the Huns were burning before retreating. But even so, we pushed them so hard that they did not have time to burn all the towns and we captured all kinds of material, guns, ammunition, equipment, etc., in fact I am writing this in one of

the towns that we managed to capture before they had a chance to destroy anything. They had occupied this town since the beginning of the war and judging from the way they had fixed things up they intended to stay here forever. All the signs are in German and we captured an army warehouse filled with German clothing, etc.

I must tell of a little incident that occurred the first night we were here, it's real funny. We took this town in the afternoon and that night a German captain who had been away somewhere and had not heard of the attack came riding into town. Well, you never saw a more surprised man in your life—he simply could not believe it at first, that is not until some doughboy tickled him between the ribs with his bayonet, then he lost no time in surrendering I can assure you!

Love,

E. J. CANRIGHT,

149th U.S. Field Artillery,
A. E. F., A. P. O. No. 715.

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE,

Nov. 2, 1918.

MY DEAR FOLKS: We are still chasing the Huns, and as they are going pretty fast, it keeps us going too, so we do not stay very long in any one position. Of course that is kind of hard on us as we never have a chance to clean up or get a comfortable place to sleep in—and it's pretty cold and rainy these days. The first thing we do when we pull into a position is to dig the "trail pits" and "lay the guns." Then each man looks around for a place to dig his "flop" (hole to sleep in). If it is possible we dig our holes in the side of a bank, as you are not quite so apt to be drowned out when it rains, but if there is no bank near enough, we just dig it on the level ground and make the best of it, even if you do get soaked. We have to dig a "flop" because it affords us some protection from shell fragments—you'd look like a sieve by morning you'd be so full of holes if you tried to sleep on top of the ground. We make them of course, just large enough to crawl into and just long enough and wide enough to

lie down in. Each man digs his own and they are dug several feet apart so that if a shell hits a "flop" it will get only one man—see? You would laugh if you could see us when old Fritz begins shelling us. If it is in the day time we will all be standing around "chewing the rag" and smoking, when all of a sudden we will hear the whine of a shell coming and then everyone makes a *dive* for his hole, for all the world like a bunch of mice running to their holes when a cat's chasing them, and then after the shell bursts, everyone sticks his head out to see where it hits.

However, Fritz has a habit of shelling us just about dusk and keeping it up on and off, all night. It is not the pleasantest thing in the world to lie in your little hole at night, all alone and in the dark and hear the shells whining overhead and bursting all around you—you can feel the earth shake and tremble from the force of the explosion, and then you hear the ugly zip of the shell fragments—you know the sound a drop of water makes when it falls on a red hot stove—well that's the sound a shell fragment makes as it tears through the air—and they travel a long ways, too, and when you hear the whang and thud of the rocks and dirt as they fall all around you, it takes a second or two for all the fragments and rocks and dirt to bury themselves in the earth, but it seems like an eternity because you can't tell whether one is going to hit you or not. Then even before the upheaval of one shell has subsided, another is bursting, and you can hear others coming—getting louder and nearer, until you think it is surely going to light right on top of you and blow you to atoms. And so it goes for hours at a time. Of course, because of my work, I have to be constantly on the alert when we are being shelled—ready to jump out of my hole and take care of anyone that gets hit. It takes courage if I do say it myself, to jump out of your hole when the shells are bursting all around and when everyone else is hugging the ground down in his "flop," and to dress a man's wounds under those conditions, and in the dark, too. And then you have to see that he is carried back to a safe place and started on his way to the hospital. As I have said before although I'm not afraid to die—I've seen too much of death to fear it—I don't *want* to die as I feel that I have the best part of my life before me. But that's my work, so I do it, and if I get

“knocked off” why I will have the satisfaction of knowing that I’ve done my duty, anyways.

I can honestly say that I have had some of the happiest and also some of the bitterest experiences of my life since I have been a soldier. War is a great teacher and I have learned many lessons—some of them hard ones, too. You know I have actually seen what the Huns have done to northern France and Belgium and know what horrors and sufferings the people who lived there have gone through, and when things are going hard and I am tired and discouraged, I like to think that I am here going through all these hardships to do my bit to keep *you* all from experiencing the same horrors that these unfortunate people have—that if we don’t lick the Huns now—and lick them to a *standstill* they might at some future time try to do the same thing in America. You can laugh at me if you want to, and say I’m foolish, but that thought gives me fresh determination to carry on. There is *nothing* I would not do to prevent you from going through even a part of what they have had to do.

As we are on territory recently occupied by the Germans, we find “beaucoup” German equipment. Just the other day I found an old German machine gun nest, with a big 1917 model, water cooled, German machine gun, and “beaucoup” boxes of ammunition. So I carried or rather dragged the gun back with me and set it up next to my “flop.” The Huns had smashed the automatic feeder on it, and so thought they had put it out of commission, but I fooled them—the only difference it makes is that now, you have to pull the ammunition belt through as it won’t feed automatically. I just love to fool with machine guns and I have had lots of fun shooting at Boche air-planes with it, and sometimes I just point her nose up in the air and “let her go,” just in hopes of getting a few Germans, as we are within machine gun range of their lines. I have, I hope, put a few of them out of commission. You know how a compressed air hammer sounds—well, that’s how a machine gun sounds, and then you can hear the zip, zip of the bullets as they cut through the air. Gee! but it’s sport.

We are supposed to have the crack division of the German army in front of us—I wish you could see them—they are just

kids fifteen to nineteen years old. If that's a sample of their *best* troops, I wonder what the rest are like—they must be the halt, the lame, and the blind. We captured a lot of prisoners yesterday and one of them was leading a beautiful, trained Red Cross dog—it had been shot in the left front paw. Well, we kept him—we've dressed his foot and fed him up—but he misses his master—he won't eat much, and he keeps looking for him all the time. He has a collar on him with a tag on it with something in German written on it; but I can't read German so I don't know what it says.

The other day a Boche aviator dropped some propaganda stuff. I wish you could read it—it's comical. It is entitled "Why Die" and asks, "Why should you Americans come over here, thousands of miles from your homes to fight and die for France and England." Then it goes on to say "Why don't you desert and come over to our lines where you will be safe and have free board at the expense of the German Government, for the duration of the war." Gee! can you *imagine* such stuff? It's really funny I think—I certainly can't imagine us doing it—can you?

Love,

E. J. CANRIGHT,

Medical Department, 149th Field Artillery,
A. P. O. No. 715 A.E.F.

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE,

November 8, 1918.

MY DEAR FOLKS: You have no doubt seen pictures of some of the battlefields over here, but you cannot fully realize the horror and the desolation and waste of the country that has been fought over, unless you have *actually* been there and seen the fields torn with shell holes and the roads and bridges mined and destroyed and the torn and twisted stumps of the trees standing like sentinels guarding the dead! And here and there you see the remains of what was *once* a town, but now is nothing but a pile of broken bricks and burned timbers! And everywhere you see—

and sometimes *smell*—the bodies of the dead lying in every conceivable position, among the refuse and broken equipment that always litters a battlefield. That is the kind of country I have been living in for *weeks*!

You have probably read in the papers of the big advance we have made and that is the kind of country we advanced over. It was hard tiresome work advancing as the roads were covered with deep, sticky mud and then to add to our difficulties, the retreating Huns had mined the roads and blown up the bridges to hold us back. But we always managed to get around some way and kept advancing day and night, stopping only long enough to get a few hours rest—we were so tired that we just dropped down along the road and slept regardless of the cold and the rain and the mud! All we had to eat was a cup of black coffee (no sugar or milk) and some hardtack twice a day! But no one complained as we were all eager to go on.

At night we could see the towns in front of us burning—the bright glare illuminating the sky and farther back would be just the dull, red glow on the horizon. It was a thrilling sight but it made one eager to go on and punish the fiends who were doing it! However, the last two or three days we have made things so hot for “Fritz” that he hasn’t had a chance to carry off all the civilians and burn the towns—he has just retreated taking with him all the male civilians who were able to do any work and leaving the old and the feeble behind! It is pathetic to see them. They put white flags on the church tower and in the windows of their homes so we wouldn’t shell the town—or what was left of it! Sometimes the Germans took advantage of this and would place machine guns in the houses and fire at us knowing that we wouldn’t shell *them* because of the civilians; but in that case we would flank the town on either side, and then Old Fritz had to get out or be taken prisoner! But he had no consideration for the civilians as he has a nice trick of placing bombs and mines with time fuses in the buildings and houses, and timing them so they will explode after we get there. So we always have to look for them when we take a town; but some of them are so cleverly concealed that we cannot find them and every little while there

will be a terrific explosion and bricks and tile and mortar go flying in the air and what was a house a few minutes before is now just a pile of broken stone! But that isn't enough damage to satisfy Fritz so when he thinks we are in the town he begins shelling it. Of course we soldiers are used to that and don't mind it, but it makes one sick to see the poor frightened civilians running for shelter and seeing their homes hit with shells, tearing great holes in the roofs and walls!

I could write pages of the stories that the civilians told me of their sufferings—how they were made to work twelve hours a day in the fields, and hauling and making war supplies, etc.—even the children and the young girls, and how the Germans took the good flour that the French government sent the civilians away from them and gave them their dirty, rotten pumpernickle—and little enough of that! And they were not allowed to visit from town to town or even write or receive any letters! And when the Germans left they took everything they could carry—even the rings and watches and the gold or silver crucifixes that the poor people had. They left them practically nothing. Can you imagine living like that for years?

If we get as cordial a welcome when we come home as these poor people gave us, we'll get *some* reception! They put on their best clothes and came out to meet us—some of them laughed and some of them cried for joy at being liberated after living little better than slaves for over four years! And nearly all of them had managed to hide a French flag all these years and they hung them over the streets! We were the first American soldiers they had seen and they were sure glad to see us. And you would have been proud of the American soldiers if you could have seen how kind and considerate they *all* were to those poor people—they gave them their bread (and we had had little enough to eat ourselves) and hardtack, and even money, and gave the old men tobacco and cigarettes! But that wasn't all they did. They helped the civilians gather up their few belongings and load them in a wheelbarrow and pile a few kids on top and move back to their homes—if they were fortunate enough to have a home left! The roads were full of peasants carrying

their few belongings in wheelbarrows or baby carriages, trudging along the road—many of them didn't even know where they were going as their homes had been destroyed, but they just kept on moving as they had no place to go to! But whenever an American soldier gets a chance he helps them along—you would laugh if it wasn't so pathetic, to see some husky young American coming down the road with some feeble old lady hanging on his arm and with his arms full of bundles and kids, or as I said before pushing a wheelbarrow or baby carriage piled high with junk and kids.

I wish you could see the fine German hospital that we captured—it sure was a marvel—it had all the modern equipment and appliances for treating the wounded! But nevertheless we are not fighting human beings, but fiends and beasts and we do not want to make peace until we have made them pay and pay dearly for their countless crimes!

Love,

E. J. CANRIGHT,

Medical Department, 149th Field Artillery,
A. E. F., A. P. O., No. 715

DERNAU, GERMANY,

Dec. 19, 1918.

MY DEAR JANE: Your most welcome letter of October 28 reached me at Quiddelbach, a few days ago, and I am going to attempt to answer it now. We were on the line and had taken Sedan and the Germans were holding the bluffs across the river when the armistice was signed on November 11. The drive started November first, with the Germans holding Grand Pré. They put up a very stiff resistance but we kept advancing and pushing them back, day and night—taking Buzancy the second day. But it was very hard work as it rained day and night so the roads were a sea of mud, and then to add to our difficulties the Germans had mined and blown up the roads; but we always managed to get our guns and caissons around the place, somehow. After the armistice was signed we rested a few days—and we needed it as we had been in the line constantly since September

12, when we took part in the St. Mihiel drive, going from there to the Argonne, and so on, just one drive after another. We also took a very active part in stopping and then counterattacking the Germans in their famous drive of July 15, on the Champagne front near Chalons. From there we were rushed up to the Chateau Thierry front, where we did some very hard fighting until we were relieved on August 11—but enough of this—I'll tell you all about that when I get back.

November 15 we left Buzancy, France, and started on our march to the Rhine. We crossed the Franco-Belgium border at Montmidy, on November 21. If such a thing were possible I would say that we were treated even better in Belgium than in France! Every town and city we marched through was decorated as for a carnival—flags of France and Belgium and America floated from the tops of the churches and schoolhouses and hung from the windows of the houses, and some of the cities had built arches of evergreen over the streets and decorated them with red, white, and blue ribbons—very pretty effect. In some of the smaller towns I noticed several homemade American flags and some of them had only six or eight stars in the blue field. But you couldn't blame the poor people as they may have never seen our flag, and anyway we were following so close on the heels of the retreating Germans that the people didn't have much time to fix up anything elaborate.

Just to show you how nice the people in Belgium treated us—the night we stopped in St. Leger I found a butcher shop, so went in to get some meat as I was hungry after riding in the saddle all day and with no dinner (we never stopped for dinner on the march), and meat was all we could get in Belgium and we were lucky to get that. While I was buying the meat a lady and her little daughter came in the shop to get some meat and the lady said if I would come to her house she would cook the meat for me, which I was very glad to have her do. Well she not only cooked my meat but she brought in a big plate of delicious fried potatoes (French fried), and bread and coffee. And that wasn't all, she brought in a plate of real waffles—made from American flour that some American soldier gave her. If you knew the

scarcity of food in Belgium you would appreciate what that meant to her. And then she gave me a dandy bedroom with a *bed* and white sheets and pillows! Oh, Boy! but I sure had a “*bon couche*” that night. And in the morning she had more waffles and coffee for me, and then she didn’t want to take any money for it after doing all of that and treating me like a king. But when I left I gave Flore, her little daughter, twenty francs (about four dollars). That is just an example of the way they treated us all through Belgium. And I wish you could have heard the stories they told, of the cruel treatment of the Germans—this little girl I told you of in St. Leger, showed me a scar on her arm, reaching from her wrist to her shoulder, made by a German *bayonet*.

We spent several days in the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg—a very pretty little country of woods and hills. I spent one day in the city of Luxemburg—the capital. It is a very quaint and picturesque city. It made me think of a book I read when I was a kid, *The Duchess of Luxemburg*. I little thought then that I would ever visit that country! But the people there were pro-German and so charged us exorbitant prices for everything. For instance, Thanksgiving day some of us fellows paid twenty marks apiece for a couple of old chickens that, judging from their toughness, had been dodging wagon and motor trucks since the war of 1870. And then the woman that cooked them for us charged us ten marks *apiece* (there were six of us) for cooking them.

We entered Germany on December first and did not reach this town until the sixteenth of December so you see we have covered quite a bit of Germany and I must say that it is much prettier than I expected it to be. Steep bluffs or cliffs rising up hundreds of feet and so steep that it is almost impossible to climb them. And yet around here the people have built paths up them and have planted grape vineyards on them, from which they make the famous Rhine wine—it is pretty good too, and costs only twelve marks a bottle here.

Billy Tursman and I are living with a German family, we have a room with a bed, etc., in it. But we do not have much to do with the Germans—they mind their business and we mind ours.

However, the man of the house where we are living was in the German army and was on our front in the Champagne drive of July 15, also the drive of St. Mihiel on Sept. 12. He knew our division and says we are very good fighters. He says our artillery barrage in the St. Mihiel drive was so heavy and accurate that they could not offer any resistance, so just retreated—those who were lucky enough to get away. It seems funny though to be sitting in a German soldier's house and talking to him when only a few weeks ago we would have tried to kill each other!

Foodstuffs in the small towns in Germany are plentiful and we can get a good meal of meat and potatoes and bread and butter for three or four marks. Of course, in the larger towns food is scarce. But I am glad we have reached our destination at last! You ride twenty or thirty kilometers a day and in the saddle from about eight o'clock in the forenoon and without stopping for dinner or anything except a ten-minute rest each hour, and you will be pretty tired; and then to do that day after day for over a month. But it has been a wonderful experience! There are many rumors going around about when we are coming home but I don't expect to come back for several months yet.

Sincerely,

E. J. CANRIGHT,

Medical Department, 149th Field Artillery,
A. E. F., A. P. O., No. 715.

DERNAU, GERMANY,

Jan. 3, 1919.

MY DEAR MRS. PIERSON: We spent a very quiet Christmas here. It snowed the night before Christmas and we woke up in the morning to find the mountains covered with snow! It made a very beautiful and picturesque picture—in fact it was so tempting that I started right out after breakfast and climbed clear to the top (they are the Eifel mountains). It was a hard climb and especially with the snow, because that made it slippery, too. But it was well worth the effort because the view from there is wonderful—you can see the Rhine River for miles with the boats going up and down it, and the little towns here and

there along its banks, and with the mountains for a background! I thought of you and how much more I would have enjoyed it all, if you could have been there with me.

Later in the day I celebrated the day by going to church—the first time I had been to church since we left Luneville last March; and in the evening we had a band concert in the town brewery—that's the only building large enough to hold us all! Nearly every German home has a Christmas tree in the front window. They look very pretty at night when they are lit up.

I have taken several trips down to Remagen—a very pretty little town on the Rhine River. The Rhine is about a mile wide there and has a very swift current. We patrol the banks of the Rhine and then we have a powerful motor boat with a machine gun mounted in the bow, that stops and searches every boat that passes up or down the river. You know the famous Apollinaris water comes from Remagen—it was named after St. Apollinaris! We travel anywhere and everywhere on the trains—and first class too, without paying fare. You know the railroads here are controlled by the German government, and we don't intend to give them any of our money.

And everywhere you go you will see pictures of the Kaiser and all his family, and of Von Hindenburg and Ludendorf! We are billeted in the schoolhouse now, and of course there are great, big pictures of Ludendorf and Hindenburg and the Kaiser and his family, and all the ex-Kaisers since the sixteenth century. But we have pasted pictures of President Wilson and General Pershing right over the pictures of the Prussian rulers. We intend to leave them there, too. The German people do not seem to think much of the Kaiser or Ludendorf, any more, but they still think Von Hindenburg is all right because he has "stuck" by the soldiers when the Kaiser and all the rest "beat it"!

All things considered I think we are pretty lenient with the Germans. However, we have arrested a few German civilians, for disobedience of orders, and have them in our guardhouse. But they get the same things to eat that we do—they are brought out under guard and eat at our kitchens, right with us! They certainly would not treat us like that if they were in power.

I would hate to live in Paris if *they* had won the war and had the troops of occupation there!

New Year's Eve we had a little party. The two ambulance drivers stationed with us entertained us with a violin and a mandolin. We had a barrel of beer (I didn't drink any though), and hardtack with a little jam, for refreshments! At midnight we all fired the clips in our automatics. Gee, it sounded like an attack! The Germans thought we were crazy and "beat it."

I wish I were back in France—the Germans can't even compare with the French, either in manners or in looks. The Germans are coarse and stupid, whereas the French are very refined and intellectual. Hope we go back there before we sail.

Sincerely,

E. J. CANRIGHT,

149th Field Artillery, A.E.F., A.P.O. No. 715.

COBLENZ, GERMANY,

March 21, 1919.

MY DEAR AUNT BLANCHE: From the banks of the Rhine, in Germany, to Milwaukee, in the good old U.S.A. is a long, long way, and I little thought when I was a kid going to school, and studied about Germany and the Rhine River, that I would ever stand "Wacht am Rhein," but that just shows how little we know our destinies.

You may be interested in a brief outline of the experiences of our Division, since leaving the United States, so I will attempt to give it to you as I remember it. We sailed from New York, October 18, 1917, on the S. S. *President Lincoln*—a German ship that was interned in New York harbor when we declared war on Germany, and we had made it into a troop ship. The German submarines torpedoed and sank it, last May.

We arrived in St. Nazaire, France, November first, 1917, and stayed there a few days. Then we went to Camp de Coetquidan, near Rennes, France, where we trained until February, when we entrained and went to the front, taking over the Luneville—and later the Baccarat sectors until July; and then because

of our good work there, were made "shock troops" and sent to the Champagne front, near Chalons, where we helped stop the famous German drive of July 15, when they tried to take Chalons! That was our first experience in open warfare, as heretofore we had had only trench warfare. And it was a hard battle, too, as the Germans put their best and specially-trained troops in front of us, and tried again and again to push us back or break our line, but we not only held them, but pushed *them* back.

After things quieted down on that front, other troops were put in our place and we were rushed up to the Chateau Thierry front, where we did some very hard fighting; pushing the Germans back through Fismes, Seringes, and Fer-en-Tardenois and across the Ourcq River. We were relieved then on August 11 and marched back through the ruins—or what was left of the once picturesque town of Chateau Thierry, and camped on the banks of the Marne River near Meaux. It was our first relief since going into the trenches in February. And we sure did enjoy the chance to rest and to swim in the river, as we were dirty and worn out and needed to get away, for a little while, from the roar and crash of the guns, and the horrible sights and hardships of the front.

We stayed there a few days and then entrained and went down to Romain-Sur-Meuse, near Chaumont, where we stayed until September first, when we started back marching by night, away up through Toul and took part in the St. Mihiel drive of September 12. We took the Germans completely by surprise and our artillery barrage was so heavy and effective that the Germans could not put up much resistance so they just retreated—that is those that were lucky enough to get away. We took many prisoners and the bodies of the dead Germans were lying everywhere, showing that we had done some good shooting. We advanced several kilometers on a wide front, liberating many towns and villages that the Germans had held for four years. And the unfortunate civilians who had been held there by the Germans, were nearly wild with joy, at being free once more.

They had been living little better than *slaves*, and told us of the cruel treatment, and the hard labor and poor and insufficient

food, and of the heavy and unjust fines that the Germans had imposed upon them! You could tell by their looks that they had suffered. After we had gained our objectives on that front, we turned it over to other troops and started the Meuse-Argonne offensive. That was the hardest of them all as the Germans put up a stubborn resistance and contested every foot that we pushed them back. And it rained continually so that the roads and fields were just a sea of mud! And to add to our difficulties the Germans mined and blew up the roads and bridges as they retreated. But we kept advancing just the same, day and night, getting what little rest and sleep, whenever and wherever we could. We were covered with mud and soaked to the skin, and we were pretty badly exhausted, too, as we had been at it, without any let up for several days. And our supplies were unable to keep up with us so we were hungry and cold, too, as all we had to eat was our emergency rations—hardtack and “corned willy”—that every soldier carries with him. And, of course, we couldn’t build a fire to dry out with—everything was too wet, in the first place and then, too, the Germans would have seen it.

But nevertheless we had the Germans on the run and we intended to chase them clear to Berlin. We had advanced a long ways and had taken Grand Pré and Buzancy, and our patrols were in the outskirts of Sedan, when the armistice was signed on November 11 and the fighting was stopped.

We rested there a few days and then started on our long march across Belgium, and the Duchy of Luxemburg and into Germany to the Rhine, arriving here December 15. This is a beautiful country—much prettier than I thought it would be. But that is no credit to the Kaiser. The German people treat us nice—they wouldn’t dare do otherwise. They do not seem to care much for the Kaiser or Crown Prince any more, but they do think a great deal of Von Hindenburg as he stayed with the soldiers when the Kaiser and the Crown Prince ran away into Holland.

There are not many young men left in Germany, as so many were killed in the war. Nearly every family has lost someone—either a father or a son—and sometimes both, in the war. There

is also a great scarcity of fats and grease. So of course they have very little soap—and what little they do have is very poor grade—practically worthless. We fellows have lots of fun trading soap as we can get almost anything with it—why some of the fellows have even got the famous German Iron Cross from some ex-German soldier's wife for a bar of laundry soap!

Rubber is also scarce, and it is a common sight to see automobiles with iron rims on them instead of tires. And even the bicycles have iron springs fastened together with an iron band in place of rubber tires. They make an awful noise, too, rattling and bumping along the streets! They don't need any horns or bells as you can hear them a mile away. Leather is also scarce and many people wear shoes made with cloth tops and wooden soles. I imagine they would be hard on the feet, and then, too, they make an awful noise, clattering along the sidewalk, but one consolation, I don't believe the soles ever wear out—and of course they are waterproof. Shall I send you a pair? Food is scarce in the larger cities, but in the small towns and villages they seem to have enough. We can get a good meal of meat and potatoes, black bread and sauerkraut for a few marks!

I have taken several trips on the Rhine River, going to Bonn and Cologne—the scenery is wonderful. I hope some day you can take it. Last month I was fortunate enough to get a two weeks furlough, part of which I spent in Paris—the most wonderful city in the world. I also spent several days in Rennes with a French family I met when I was there a year ago. I sure had a grand time and I dreaded to come back to Germany again as I love France and the French people.

General Pershing inspected our division last Sunday. It was quite an interesting occasion. He said many nice things about us, too. General Pershing is a fine appearing man—"every inch a soldier," and a commander-in-chief to be proud of.

We expect to turn in our horses and guns in a few days, so perhaps we will leave here soon.

Love,

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